

on your feet!

Go Organic



Kate Maynard finds out why opting for organic is the future of food.

'A marrow!' exclaimed my housemate as she examined the contents of her fortnightly home-delivered crate of organic fruit, vegetables and dairy products. I was intrigued to see what she would do with this particular giant green vegetable, only recently having seen her do marvellous things with a baked pumpkin – and October was months away. Despite her ability to regularly quaff alcohol late into the night, each slurp accompanied by a puff on a cigarette, Lucie is a strict 'organic vegetarian'. No cup of tea passes her lips with milk from a polluted cow and she happily loads up her trolley at the supermarket organic aisle, regardless of price or cheaper alternatives. When asked for a quote for this article, she offered to write it herself!

So what is all the fuss about organic produce? Above all, organic food only contains FOOD and it is full of the natural vitamins, minerals and nutrients we need. Non-organic meat we consume may contain antibiotic residues and growth promoters which were given to the animals. Furthermore BSE has never been found in organic beef herds, drug-free animals that graze on wild pasture.

Battery hens are given antibiotics and hormones as well and it is their eggs that are used in most processed food like ready meals, pasta, cakes and biscuits. Fancy a good, healthy loaf of whole wheat bread or a crunchy bright green apple? Non-organic grains may be coated with remnants of pesticides, and non-organic apples can have all kinds of artificial chemicals on their skin.

With further additions of artificial additives, preservatives, colourings, flavourings and hydrogenated fats, the resulting build-up in our bodies caused by eating non-organic food from intensive farming could contribute to high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, gut problems, IBS, and obesity. Intensively-reared cattle are also a known source of the lethal E.coli bacteria.

In the UK, working the soil way past its natural state leads to erosion and the destruction of forests and hedgerows, the natural habitats for numerous species of wildlife. There has been a 95% decline in farmland birds since pesticides were introduced in to farming, but organic farms have been shown to have 44% more birds and many more wild plants.

So why are organic products more expensive? The truth is, they aren't, as we actually pay more for conventional food through our taxes. The government subsidises intensive farming, and we pay again through costs to clean up the chemicals that get into our water supplies, to clean up the ecosystem, and to fight the BSE crisis – which has cost £4 billion. Organic yields may take a little longer to reach the shops and the produce may not be as bright, colourful or long-lasting, but it's the closest to pure food we can get. Through purchasing it we are supporting organic farmers and the organic market, while protecting the environment and health of our families and future generations. Maybe next time you're in the supermarket you'll have a closer look at the organic aisle. You might just spot Lucie perusing the organic wines!


Info sources

www.organicfood.co.uk
www.westcountryorganics.co.uk
www.organic eats.co.uk
www.organicdelivery.co.uk
www.whyorganic.org

on your feet

Pet de-stress

The family pet might just be the way to keep the stress levels at bay, says **Arveen Bajaj**.



When looking for ways to take time out and relax from the stresses and strains of busy work and home lives, some people like to go for a soothing massage, some prefer to take it out on the treadmill at the gym while others like to pop down to the pub. However, the solution could be a lot closer to home than you think, in fact, it could be in your home if you are a pet owner.

Many people love their pets and consider them family members, but pets can also help our health and ease stress, a phenomenon that has undergone many studies in recent years.

Stroking a pet or watching a fish swim in an aquarium can help people to relax, can reduce heart rate and lower blood pressure. Pets can provide companionship, and lessen feelings of isolation or loneliness, perhaps because the act of looking after a pet gives a sense of purpose.

According to a study released in 2000, pets lower blood pressure just by being present. Researchers led by Dr. Karen Allen, at the State University of New York at Buffalo, investigated the health benefits of pets on a group of 48 male and female New York stockbrokers, who all lived alone, had highly stressful jobs and who were already using medication to control high blood pressure.

Half of the subjects were randomly selected to adopt a dog or cat at the beginning of the study and were found to have lower blood pressure readings in stressful situations than their pet-less counterparts did. The results were so striking that participants who did not have pets even decided to acquire one after the study. Dr Allen asserted that while medication can lower blood pressure, it cannot relieve the stress which can force blood pressure back up again, but pets can.

Walking dogs can keep us healthy not only because of all the extra exercise we get from doing it, but owners feel less afraid of being a victim of crime when walking with a dog or sharing a residence with a one.

There can also be beneficial psychological effects as well as physical. The Humane Society of Canada (HSC) says that animal companions can play an important role for those living with HIV and AIDS as pets can reduce the likelihood of people with AIDS from suffering from depression. It cites a study by researchers at the UCLA School of Public Health who found that men with AIDS who had attachments with their pets were less likely to suffer from depression when compared to men with AIDS and who did not have a pet.

So, you never know, perhaps tonight a little quality time with you're your furry or fishy friend might do you both the world of good!

on your feet:

PULL YOUR WELLIES ON

Are a host of golden daffodils nodding in your garden? **Kate Maynard** puts the winter blues behind her and rediscovers her garden.

Want to stretch your legs but don't fancy the route along the main road past the roundabout with the great view of teenagers carousing on the corner? Is your significant other spending the weekend going for a new record in couch-potato-living? At times like this the little bit of earth adjoining your house can be a godsend. Even if you live in the suburbs of a sprawling city, your garden can be an oasis to escape to for a bit of exercise and a breath of fresh air (or at least air not filled with the sounds of boozy football spectators chanting anthems).

Whether you've been inspired by one of the ubiquitous gardening programmes on TV or just want to give your backyard a bit of colour with terracotta pots, gardening can be both rewarding and therapeutic. If the last time you planted anything was a box of cress in primary school (in my case I over-watered my first cactus so much the roots turned to slime) there are plenty of books and websites around to guide you in the first steps to creating and nurturing a garden. You may fantasise about a fabulous water feature tumbling over a tiered rockery alongside a pergola festooned with many-coloured roses... but more often than

not, unless you hold a diploma in landscape gardening, less is usually more.

According to the Royal Horticultural Society, March is the ideal time to start preparing your garden for planting now that winter (should be) behind us. Prepare the soil in your borders and vegetable patches by turning it over with a garden fork (digging is great exercise); sow vegetable crops including potatoes, beans, beetroot, radish, marrows and courgettes; if you have a greenhouse, plant tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines and peppers – they will all welcome the early spring sunlight. The blossoms of early flowering fruits like peaches and apricots and newly-planted bulbs need to be sheltered from ground frost. Meanwhile you can give your garden a good spring clean: do some weeding; remove debris like dead leaves from ponds and borders; prune large trailing plants and cut away broken shoots; pack exposed roots back into the ground; put down compost as well as slug traps to protect new seeds and shoots. March is also the time to plant flowers like carnations, chrysanthemums, carnations, pansies and roses: it won't be long before your garden is in full bloom and winter – and being cramped indoors – will just be a distant memory.

Useful websites

www.rhs.org.uk

www.greenfingers.com

www.ba-education.demon.co.uk
(select gardening)